Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative (ESIC) planning process:
Interim Report

Global SDG Synthesis Coalition (GSDSC)

Building a Global Evidence Synthesis Community (BGESC)

Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE)

Center for Rapid Evidence Synthesis (ACRES)

Planning group 1: **Governance**	Stage 4b report: **Solutions and costing**	Last updated: **5 June 2025**	Consultation window: **6-11 June 2025**

ESIC Governance Planning Group Stage 4b Report

Executive Summary

To ensure that ESIC helps to bring about a step change in the evidence synthesis ecosystem, it is essential that its activities are supported by appropriate governance models. Good governance has the potential to encourage synergies across evidence synthesis solutions, to promote better coordination and reduced fragmentation within the evidence synthesis ecosystem, and to facilitate more equitable inclusion of under-represented regions and sectors in evidence synthesis initiatives. Supporting governance models must be fair and transparent, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

During the ESIC Consultation period, the Governance Planning Group has been considering options for governance. This ESIC Governance Planning Group (GPG) Stage 4b report presents a rationale for, and details of, costing options for two possible governance models presented in the 4a report.

Following a principle of subsidiarity, costings are presented for governance and coordination functions that are essential, but which are not already embedded in solutions developed by other working groups. These include central connector functions such as advocacy, communications and partnership development, and coordination support for the other evidence synthesis functions outlined in Report 4a (*namely participatory platforms, decentralised engine rooms and core infrastructure*).

Following this logic, costings are provided for two models: a) a comprehensive option, with a higher budget, and b) a basic option, delivered at lower cost. For both options there is an assumption that staffing will increase over an initial five-year period, starting with a limited number of staff and reaching full capacity in Year Three.

OPTION 1 is a higher-cost model and proposes that a secretariat is created to: a) deliver the connector function, and b) provide support for or coordination with the other functions within the quadrant.

Total costs for this option over a five-year period would be **US$ 7,602,955** (US$9,123,546 with a 20% overhead). This represents 3.42% of the total budget of the prioritised ESIC solutions.

For **OPTION** 2, a small evidence synthesis network coordination team is proposed. This option would provide a more limited range of connector functions and coordination support to other quadrants.

Total costs for this option over a five-year period would be **US$**3,182,120 (US$ 3,818,544 with a 20% overhead). This represents 1.43% of the total budget of the prioritised ESIC solutions.

Stage 4b Report

Introduction

This report presents costing options for two governance models developed in the GPG Stage 4a report. Costings cover an initial five-year period. The governance models envisaged link to the quadrant model, where:

- Externally-facing centralised functions provided by a **connector**,
- Externally-facing decentralised functions are hosted by **participatory platforms**,
- Centralised internal functions support the evidence synthesis community through provision of **core infrastructure**, and
- Internally-facing decentralised functions are supported by **engine rooms**.

Connector functions are particularly important in relation to the costing of future governance. These functions include advocacy for evidence synthesis, strategy development (to support, for example, greater inclusion and equity in evidence synthesis and reduction in duplication across the ecosystem), communications, liaison with funders, partnership development, and monitoring, evaluation and learning. These functions have the potential to drive a step change in evidence synthesis, to create synergies across evidence synthesis solutions and to encourage better coordination between evidence synthesis interest holders. Given this, the governance options focus on the provision of connector functions, alongside coordination support for other functions. To clarify we have not costed governance of the other functions as we assume that governance and management of solutions within these quadrants will be embedded and costed in the solutions themselves. We do, however, cost coordination with solutions in the other quadrants.

The two governance models that are set out are:

Option 1, a higher-capacity model for a central secretariat, providing core connector evidence synthesis functions, and coordination support for the other three quadrant functions mentioned above. This is a higher-budget model.

Option 2: an alternative lower-cost option for a more lightly-staffed secretariat providing more limited connector functions and coordination support.

The report presents the principles that have been used to guide choices about costing, highlighting the importance of subsidiarity and efficiency.

An explanation of possible staffing requirements for the two options is also provided. This includes indicating the level of staffing needed to provide support to and coordinate with the other quadrant functions. The staffing suggestions are flexible and may alter depending on what solutions Wellcome and other funders choose to invest in.

Principles guiding costing

In thinking about costing for governance options, we have been informed by the following principles:

1. **Subsidiarity** – governance models proposed in Report 4a follow the principles of subsidiarity, and the costing model follows suit. In practice this means that costing is for the governance activities undertaken by the connector function. It is assumed that internal governance, oversight and management of any funded projects or programs is costed within those projects and programs. There could be times where the central governance structure is asked to take over project management for an activity in one of the three other quadrants (e.g. if there is no obvious group to do this outside of the central governance structure). However, if this is the case, then the governance, oversight and management should have been costed into the project/program funding.

2. **Efficiency** – it is likely that future ESIC[1]-related projects and programs will need similar infrastructure (e.g. a website). It would be inefficient (and user unfriendly) for each project/program to create its own website on a local host. An ESIC website would be managed by the connector hosting webpages from projects and programs (in addition to being a first port of call for information on evidence synthesis).

In addition, we also suggest that:

1. The overall governance costs should be modest compared to the total budget.
2. The evidence synthesis connector should aim to become self-funded by the end of the five-year period. It is expected that a consortium of funders would provide support over the initial five year-phase.
3. However, the evidence synthesis connector must avoid competing with evidence synthesis groups for funding.

It is also noted that an **interim governance planning phase** will be needed after the ESIC planning period ends to support the development of governance structures and coordination processes for future evidence synthesis/ESIC initiatives. This structure is critical to ensure that transformative evidence synthesis activities are optimally planned, connected and supported. How this group or entity will be constituted is still to be determined.

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[1] We are using the name ESIC for convenience. We recognise that a future evidence synthesis initiative might not be called ESIC, and that what emerges after the ESIC planning period -including scope, organisation, funding, partnerships etc – is still to be determined.

Two costed governance options

This section presents two options derived from the decision tool presented in Report 4a. We have rejected the option of a highly centralised initiative where governance of all future ESIC activities is carried out by a single organisation. There is little appetite for a command-and-control model in the evidence synthesis community. We have also noted that whilst a fully decentralised model would be possible, it would likely result in a failure to nurture evidence synthesis as a public good. For example, it would be less likely to identify and support extension of evidence synthesis into underserved regions or sectors. It is possible that funders do not invest in either of the options proposed here. This would amount in effect to choosing a decentralised model.

The two core options presented are as follows:

OPTION 1 proposes that a secretariat is created to a) **deliver the connector function** and b) liaise with or **coordinate the other functions** within the quadrant.

A central secretariat would have core staff to carry out all connector functions described in the 4a report (including advocacy, strategy development, liaison with funders, partnership development, communications and monitoring, evaluation and learning).

All the organisational functions provided by the other quadrants (participatory platforms, core infrastructure and engine rooms) would receive some coordination support from the secretariat. *As noted above, it is assumed that staffing for delivery of these other functions will be costed by the WGs.*

In addition to staffing, budgets will also be required for:

- Website development and maintenance, laptops and software, translation services, communications products, travel to meetings and events, capacity building of staff, and citizen engagement.

The costings presented here are for an initial five-year period. Roll out of governance mechanisms would be phased over the five years, staffing would gradually increase over the first three years of the initiative.

Governance for the quadrant functions under Option 1 would be supported as follows:

1. Connector

Organisation: secretariat providing functions listed above, may be decentralised and in several locations. If there is a single predominant location, this would likely be in the Global South.

Staffing requirements (assumed to be full time roles):

- Director (CEO level/designation to be determined)
- Operations manager, (senior level); finance manager (mid-level)

- Five theme leads (exact roles to be confirmed, but possibly): Communications; advocacy; monitoring, evaluation and learning; funder liaison; equity strategy and implementation (mid-level)
- Administrative support (admin scale) x2

2. Participatory platforms

Organisation: Ten participatory platforms (2 per UN region). These could be virtual, or could have a physical location, and could be in hosted organisations. It will also be necessary to confirm that this number of participatory platforms aligns with the solutions being presented by the ESIC Working Groups.

Staffing requirement: for coordination with connector. Only secretariat support is costed by GPG.

- 3 staff in secretariat to support platforms (one senior; two mid-level)

3. Engine rooms

Organisation: Assumption ten engine rooms (but this is to be determined), these could be virtual, or may have physical location, and there could be 2 per UN region.

Staffing requirement: coordination support. Only secretariat support is costed.

- 3 staff provide coordination support to engine rooms (one senior; 2 mid-level)

4. Core infrastructure

Organisation: core infrastructure functions could be delivered in several different ways: for example, by one organisation linked to the connector in a single secretariat; in a separate organisation or a series of organisations. For the Option 1 secretariat there would be four task teams covering four core infrastructure work areas (possibly methods and processes, data sharing, capacity building, and AI tools). These task teams would ensure that the enabling benefits of core infrastructure work are communicated and shared effectively externally. Teams would also share feedback needs on the demand side to infrastructure delivery organisations.

Staffing requirement: for coordination with areas of technical work

- 2 staff for each task team coordination point (total of 8 staff) – mid-level

Overall staffing requirement for Option 1

The maximum Option 1 staffing requirements described here are for Year 3 following (of an initial five-year operating period). The initiative will start with a smaller staffing requirement to reflect needs during a start-up period. One possible progression is set out in the table below (staff are all assumed to be full-time):

Personnel	Yr1	Yr2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr5
Director	1	1	1	1	1
Senior	1	2	3	3	3
Mid-level	2	5	18	18	18
Admin	2	4	6	6	6
Total staffing requirement	6	12	28	28	28

Costings for Option 1

Evidence Synthesis Secretariat – Comprehensive model

Category	Direct Costs by category (US$)	Percentage of total direct costs
People	5,234,129	68.84%
Contracts	1,250,000	16.44%
Tools	64,976	0.85%
Training event attendance	400,000	5.26%
Citizen engagement	102,600	1.35%
Travel	367,000	4.83%
Dissemination	184,250	2.42%
Other	0	0.00%
Total direct costs	7,602,955	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	9,123,546	

This costing represents 3.42% of the total costs of the prioritised ESIC solutions.

Note:

Contracts is a budget for third party contracts, such as for website development and management and pieces of analytical work.

OPTION 2

For OPTION 2, a small evidence synthesis network coordination team is proposed. Staffing requirements might begin as 4 people in Year 1 and rise to 8 for Years 3-5.

This option would cover fewer of the connector functions, or provide them in less depth, and would also offer more limited coordination of structures delivering functions in the participatory platforms, engine rooms and core infrastructure quadrants. We have not specified which connector functions, and which coordination would not be provided, this would be determined in a future planning phase. However, it should be noted that there are risks with a reduced model that advocacy, networking support and citizen engagement with evidence synthesis is carried out in a sub-optimal way, with significant gaps and missed opportunities. If governance functions are picked up by decentralised entities this could also be more costly in aggregate, as economies of scale would be lost.

For Option 2, staffing would cover: a) a reduced selection of connector functions, for example, possibly advocacy and communications, and b) liaison with other evidence synthesis organisations on technical issues. Over time, support for technical functions and decentralised initiatives would increase as these mechanisms themselves increase in number and scope. Staffing is assumed to be full-time.

	Yr1	Yr 2	Yr3	Yr4	Yr5
Senior	1	2	2	2	2
Mid-level	1	2	4	4	4
Admin	2	2	2	2	2
Total staffing requirement	**4**	**6**	**8**	**8**	**8**

For Option 2, in addition to staffing, a budget will also be required for:

- Website development and maintenance, laptops and software, translation services communications products, travel to meetings and events, capacity building of staff, and citizen engagement.

Costings for Option 2

Evidence Synthesis Secretariat – Basic model

Category	Direct Costs by category (US$)	Percentage of total direct costs
People	1,760,274	55.32%
Contracts	1,000,000	31.43%
Tools	28,396	0.89%
Training event attendance	100,000	3.14%
Citizen engagement	51,300	1.61%
Travel	154,250	4.85%
Dissemination	87,900	2.76%
Other	0	0.00%
Total direct costs	3,182,120	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	3,818,544	

This represents 1.43% of the total costs of the prioritised ESIC solutions.

Note:

Contracts is a budget for third party contracts, such as for website development and management and pieces of analytical work.

Implementation

As the ESIC planning period comes to an end in July 2025, it will still be necessary to put in place an interim governance planning structure to provide guidance and advice on how initiatives and solutions can be best coordinated and how accountable governance across the evidence synthesis ecosystem can be best supported. It may be possible to start to establish a secretariat in this period and begin to implement the functions described in this report. This is subject to further consultation, however, and remains to be determined.

Value for Money

The governance models proposed here offers value for money in that we have costed a lean-but-optimally-sized model, with an appropriate number of personnel at the right levels to carry out

necessary tasks. The governance and coordination will support activities that create significant synergies and widespread benefits across the evidence synthesis ecosystem. At under 3.5 per cent of the total ESIC costed proposals, the share of spending on secretariat governance functions is low.

It is possible to reduce these core governance costs further by selecting the Option 2 model, but we note that this will result in significant under-delivery of critical functions that can have multiplier effects. It is also likely that many apparent cost savings will be lost if functions then need to be picked up elsewhere (for example, a website, communications products and coordination activities).

Alignment with the Show Me Principles

The governance model described here aligns with the Show Me the Evidence principles in the following ways:

- *Support systems nationally (and locally) that use many forms of research evidence to help address local priorities*

Effective governance and coordination will support connections and participatory platforms that ensure research evidence addresses local priorities.

- *Harmonized efforts globally that make it easier to learn from others around the world*

Governance supports better systems and practices for harmonisation across the evidence ecosystem.

- *Open-science approaches that make it the norm to build on what others have done*

The governance proposed will facilitate communication of the benefits of open-science norms and methods, and will help to broker agreements between relevant parties, thereby embedding more open practices across the evidence ecosystem.

- *Waste-reduction efforts that make the most of investments in evidence support and in research*

A core function of governance will be to advocate for waste reduction and to encourage agreements between key organisations and interest holders to secure this.

- *Measured communications that clarify what we know from existing evidence and with what caveats*

Governance will support the development of partnerships, tools and platforms that enable better communication of quality evidence synthesis.

- *Equity and efficiency in all aspects of this work.*

Equity is a key principle shaping the design of governance structures. Governance and coordination must be equitable in terms of representation of diverse sectors, regions, citizens and other interest holders. Equity will be a core value shaping the activities of a governance secretariat, including promotion of inclusion and diversity, and challenging of historic inequalities in the production of and access to evidence synthesis.

These activities will be carried out efficiently through a secretariat of optimal size, with an appropriate level of resourcing, and efficient management systems and practices.